

What Standardization Means to Automobile Buyers

IT MEANS VALUE the utmost in efficiency per dollar of cost. Just to the extent that a car is standardized does the buyer's dollar approach the maximum of purchasing power.

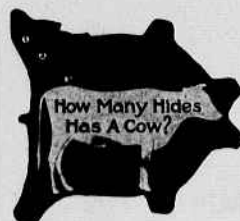
Standardization means definite, proved quality, known manufacturing costs and reduced selling costs.

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Missing—Roberta Hoyt!

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and under the circumstances I could not wonder. But the situation struck me as the queerest ever.

Tal's house being a little north of my hotel, we dropped him first. Judging by Dr. Rice's cordial good night, they had hit it off pretty well, and it was that, I reckon, that made him turn round and offer his hand to me when I got up to climb out at the Cecil.

I took the doctor's hand. My coat collar was turned up and my hat pulled down as far as possible, but when Fate starts out to turn a trick nothing stops her. The instant I met those near-sighted eyes through the thick lenses of the big shell spectacles, I knew they had recognized me. I felt an involuntary twitch of fat fingers; then our hands fell apart and I got out.

"Thanks ever so much. Good night," I said. They repeated the good night, and that was all.

"Well," said I to myself. "And now what?"

I AWOKE about ten o'clock, and at once had the morning papers sent up. The date on the first struck my eye and brought a slight shock of surprise: "Thursday, October 31." Only Thursday! And all this had happened since Tuesday afternoon, less than two days ago.

The first thought that had flashed into my mind that morning was that Dr. Rice had recognized me. What was I to do about it? Of course, I could deny everything; but where was all my lying to end?

Tal found me in the restaurant at breakfast.

"What in blazes made you double-cross me last night?" he demanded.

"Oh, go to the devil!" I snapped.

If I had to go on lying right and left, there was one thing sure—it was not going to be to Talbot Sands. He could ask questions till he was blue in the face.

He chuckled. "Never took you for such a slushy boob, Dick. Wanted to rescue the beautiful lady, eh? Well, I only hope she'll be grateful."

He grinned, sat down, and reached for my cigarettes.

"Well, we're back to where we started," he observed cheerfully.

"Thinking of starting again?" I inquired.

"I am not. If a girl doesn't want to be found, why find her? I'll bet Miss Bobbie Hoyt is satisfied with her present whereabouts or she wouldn't be there. Dr. Rice says you can gamble on it."

"He's sore because she turned down Farnham."

"I guess that's right. Anyhow, he'd like mighty well to spot that guy she's with. Funny, that they can't even make a guess, considering how well Farnham knew her. She can't have eloped with a total stranger."

"I don't see why you take it for granted that she has eloped at all."

"What else would a girl run away for? Oh, she's married, or will be within the next week. Think she's likely to overlook the fact that if she is not a Mrs. when the clock strikes twelve on the night of November seventh, she'll be a pauper?"

"Does Farnham think she's married?"

"Don't know. The doctor does. Oh, by the way, he called me up this morning—got me out of bed before nine—to ask your name. Said you look a good deal like a man he used to know. Said he noticed the resemblance last night, but couldn't place it till this morning. Wanted to know where you're from, how long you've been in town, what's your business here, and a million other things."

Tal paused to laugh. "He even asked if you'd ever met Miss Hoyt. I said if you had you didn't know it."

"That's true," I put in—and heaven knows it was.

"We talked about the case a little, and he wanted to know what you thought about it. I said you weren't much inter-

ested and had only gone with me the other night to be obliging. Then he wondered, of course, why you had warned Farnham if you were not interested, and I told him it was because you didn't think the affair at Riverton had anything to do with Miss Hoyt—that you'd always said so."

"Queer that he should ask my opinion—don't you think so?" I ventured through a screen of cigarette smoke.

"No. He's so hipped on the subject, he'd ask the opinion of a lamp-post," was the unflattering response. "You'll probably hear from him to-day about the friend you look like."

But at eight o'clock that evening I had not yet heard from Dr. Rice—that is, directly. Indirectly, I thought I had heard several times. At any rate, somebody was spying on me.

To begin with, right after breakfast and after Tal's departure, one of the hotel clerks volunteered the information that a man had inquired if I was still stopping there, and, being answered in the affirmative, had said that was all he wanted to know and had gone away. The clerk's description of the man suggested no one I knew, and I was naturally puzzled.

A little later I got a real jolt from the telephone operator at the Cecil in the shape of news that some unknown man had tried to pump her about me.

"He wanted to know if you got many calls from ladies, and I told him there's three or four keeps your wire busy all day."

She giggled, and, having yet to receive my first call of the kind, I grinned back and admitted that the joke was on me.

"Oh, he fell for it all right," she assured me seriously. "I'm onto my job. You'll never catch me giving a friend away."

I questioned her as to the inquirer's looks, and finally concluded that, whoever he might be, he was certainly not Farnham, Dr. Rice, or Mulrooney. Doubtless it was some detective hired by Rice, though his methods seemed crude for a professional.

I went up to my room, and happened to want something in my portfolio. And the instant I opened the portfolio I knew some one had been through it. Nothing was missing, but things were out of order.

Looking about the room for other signs of trespassing, I found none. In the closet, like a "skeleton," hung the one bit of evidence against me—my blue serge suit and black hat.

GIVING up the puzzle at last, I started out, and stopped as usual to leave my key with the floor clerk. "Mame" was in her place, and near her the "terrible Jimmy." Their voices, loud and lively, reached me as I stepped into the hall; but the instant I hove into sight a hush fell upon them.

"Mail for you, Mr. Terrill," said the girl, handing me three letters.

"Thanks; the train must have been late," I answered. You see, I had inquired several times for mail within the preceding hour, as my Southern letters usually came in on a certain train and I knew almost to the minute when to expect them.

"Yes—I guess so," she replied, and something in the way she said it made me glance sharply at her, then at the boy. Both dropped their eyes.

A thought flashed to me. "My key!" I demanded, and with it went back to my room. There it took me just two minutes to convince myself that all three of my letters had been opened. That was why the train had been late! The hotel must be behind the man who was watching me.

Desirous of making sure of this, I went straight to the telephone operator with whom I had talked in the morning. She greeted me with a frightened, wavering smile, and as soon as I got near enough whispered hurriedly: "Go into a booth. I got something to tell you."